




SAMARITANS

DEAL with Poetry

Using poetry to improve the emotional health of young people



poet in the city

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Guide to symbols

The following symbols are in the session plans to denote different types of activities:



Audio



Creative



Drama



Facilitator input



Hand out worksheet



Individual activity



Whole group discussion



Small group activity



Work in pairs



Writing

Introduction

Using poetry to develop the emotional health of young people

Poetry and the arts have been used for thousands of years as a form of self expression. There is increasing evidence that engaging with literature and writing can have beneficial effects on emotional health.

“Poetry, like emotion, is something you can feel but not touch. It allows for the expression of emotion in the most vivid, concentrated and memorable ways. Writing poetry can be a form of therapy. It can be a means to focus on and crystallise inchoate feelings. It can be a way of interrogating and exploring what we mean when we try to say what we feel.” – **Andy Croft, Poet**

“Young people have many ways of expressing themselves, through music, drama, sport and with friends. The one thing they are not so confident at is talking about difficult feelings. Admitting they have a problem or are not coping remains taboo. We see the effects of building emotional pressure in antisocial behaviour, bullying or individuals withdrawing from the world around them. Research shows that 1 in 10 self harm as a way of expressing and coping with the emotional pain they feel inside.”

“Young people’s communication skills improved, as did their willingness and ability to discuss emotional issues with peers. Their appreciation of contemporary poetry was heightened and their confidence in reading out their own work.”

“Approaching issues obliquely through poetry stimulates and informs debate among young people about emotional health in their own lives. Equipping a person with emotional skills like self awareness, empathy and the ability to communicate feelings enables them to cope with difficult times.”

“It is with great joy that we watch young people stretch their minds, discover the value of self expression and the power that each hold within them. I read once that an emotionally disconnected person holds pockets of unresolved anger, fear, resentment, pain or other emotions locked up within their body and mind. The key to unlocking these emotions is the best gift we can give young people.” – **Aisling Doherty, Poet**

About DEAL with Poetry

This is a resource pack that uses an innovative arts-based approach to developing emotional health through poetry. This resource can be used as Module E in Samaritans’ Developing Emotional Awareness and Learning (DEAL) programme.

Developed by poet educators, the resource contains session plans that can be used in both small groups and in classroom environments. The materials are aimed at the 14-16 age group but can be used with other young people to develop skills in:

- Self awareness
- Empathy
- Recognising, expressing and managing difficult feelings
- Literacy and creative thinking



Introduction

The pack contains four 45 minute session plans, each with 15 minute extension activities, followed by more detailed notes about how to conduct each activity. The sessions are designed to be taught by anyone who has experience of working with young people so whether you are a teacher, a poet, a volunteer or a youth worker you can use these activities.

In schools these sessions can be used as part of an English or PSHE curriculum. It is recommended they are used as part of a scheme of work relating to emotional health and wellbeing and as part of a whole school approach to emotional wellbeing.

We recommend you read the information section below. It will tell you everything you need to know about the programme and gives some important tips on how to deliver the sessions in a safe and engaging way.

Emotional health is for everyone – tips for working with young people

Emotional health is part of our overall health and is concerned with the way we think and feel. It refers to our sense of wellbeing and our ability to cope with life events. Emotional health is about our ability to acknowledge and respect our own emotions as well as those of others.

We are all constantly using our emotional and social skills. Every day we interact with others at home and in our community. Every day we have new experiences and develop thoughts and feelings about the world around us. So emotional health promotion is not just about people who may be at risk of emotional health problems, it is for every person that forms a part of the school community; students, staff, and parents alike. When delivering these materials, why not see how each of these groups can get involved?

The sessions are not designed for use as therapy, for individuals. However it is advisable to let others such as the school counsellor know you are running them, in case students want to discuss any of the issues raised.

The following tips are designed to help you run sessions on emotional health with young people. Making sure a session is emotionally safe, positive and inclusive will make for a more effective and fun learning environment.

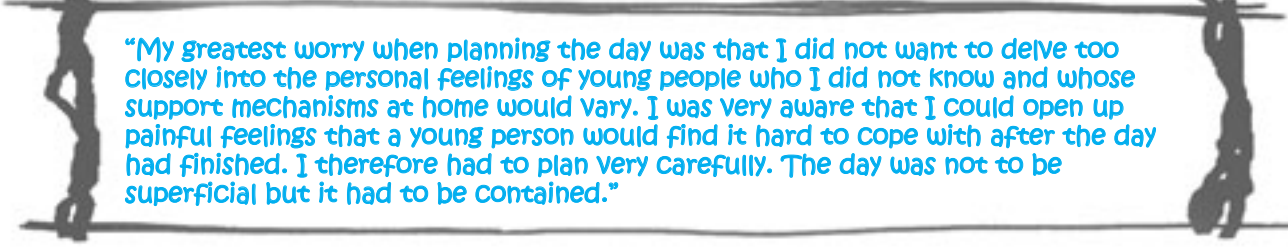


Introduction

Safe

Developing emotional health awareness is about enabling people to examine the role of feelings, thoughts and experiences in their own lives and those of others.

Unlike therapy, it does not involve a person disclosing their own experiences, though they can if they choose to. Instead, examples of day to day situations are used for discussions and skills practice. This de-personalises the issues so that a young person can express themselves without feeling personally exposed. They have the chance to safely practice skills which they may then apply to other parts of their lives.




“My greatest worry when planning the day was that I did not want to delve too closely into the personal feelings of young people who I did not know and whose support mechanisms at home would vary. I was very aware that I could open up painful feelings that a young person would find it hard to cope with after the day had finished. I therefore had to plan very carefully. The day was not to be superficial but it had to be contained.”

When delivering a session it is however important to remember that there is likely to be at least one young person in the group who has personal experience of the issues being discussed. The same applies to the facilitator who may be affected too. A number of features are built into the session plans to help make the classroom an emotionally safe learning environment for everyone.

- At the start of each session the class agrees ground rules about behaviour during the session, confidentiality and respect for others.
- Never ask young people to disclose personal information unless they choose to. This includes not being forced to share their written work. Discussing examples, characters and case studies is a good alternative.
- If a person raises something that is better dealt with one to one, thank them for being open and sharing with everyone and offer to have a longer conversation outside of the session.
- At the end of the session let people know where they can go if they want to talk more about any of the issues raised. It is important to be specific about who this is and to give more than one option.

Positive



“My hopes before the residency were for a day of fun but serious thinking as well. A day when, at the end, pupils felt they had achieved something in their own writing that put them a little more in touch with themselves”

Sessions on emotional health can cover serious issues but overall they should convey optimism. Emotional skills are skills that a person will use for life. They can help people to express



Introduction

themselves, build good relationships and have better self awareness. Understanding emotional health problems helps us to cope ourselves and to support friends during difficult times.

- Start with something everyone can relate to. Build people's confidence by running a session on emotional awareness and coping skills before tackling more complex issues.
- Use a mix of learning styles. Activities can lighten a session without detracting from a serious message.
- If covering complex issues like self harm or loss, don't leave people feeling powerless to do anything about it. Make sure you include a discussion on what to do if this happens or how to support a friend in this situation.
- Use the time at the end of the session to draw together learning and reflect on the ideas and opinions expressed. Stress the positives and what sources of help are out there.

Inclusive

Everyone has different experiences, attitudes and beliefs. Wide ranging views make for a rich variety within a group but also mean that differences of opinion are likely. Particularly when studying people and emotions, there are no right or wrong answers and each person's opinion must be treated as equally valid. An important part of developing empathy is being able to explore other people's views with an open mind and a well facilitated group session role models this approach and makes sure everyone feels respected and included.

- Use open questions during the session to encourage people to explore all sides of an issue; seeking out its complexity, asking people to acknowledge and respect differences of opinion and the right of each person to make their own decisions.
- Explore any negative reactions or stereotypes by asking the person to explain why they feel this way. Invite other opinions to paint a fuller picture.
- Acknowledge difficult feelings. If a young person describes a situation they have struggled with, show you have understood by reflecting back or summarising what they have said.
- The facilitator should be aware of his or her own beliefs and values and how these influence their reaction to young people's opinions.
- Be aware of cultural differences in terms of how emotional health is viewed, taboos around expressing problems or feelings and sources of support available to them.

Find further DEAL resources

Samaritans' Developing Emotional Awareness and Learning (DEAL) programme is an emotional health promotion programme for the 14-16 age group. It equips secondary schools with the skills to help young people develop the knowledge and skills to deal with the challenges they face in life. DEAL has sessions for:

- Drama
- Citizenship
- English
- Geography
- PSHE

Introduction

Your local Samaritans branch may have volunteers active in schools. To order a copy of DEAL, or to find your local branch, contact:

Samaritans: The Upper Mill, Kingston Road, Ewell, Surrey KT17 2AF.
Tel: **020 8394 8300**
Website: www.samaritans.org/deal Email: schools@samaritans.org

Looking for a poet to work with your school?

If you would like to take poetry and emotional health work further, you may want to consider inviting a poet educator to come in and run a session. Their expertise and experience may add a new dimension for young people.

*"The residency proved to be highly motivating. It was extremely satisfying to see pupils expressing themselves so freely. I am very proud of their achievements and also slightly envious that I'm no longer a teenager myself!" –
Form tutor.*

"The poet was friendly and we had lots of laughs throughout the week." – Young man aged 15.

Residencies of up to five days can be organised via the following organisations:

Lapidus: BM Lapidus, London WC1N 3XX.

Tel: 0845 602 2215 Email: info@lapidus.org.uk Website: www.lapidus.org.uk

Poet in the City: *Poet in the City*, c/o Dechert LLP, 160 Queen Victoria Street, London EX4V 4QQ







Tel: 07908 367488 Website: www.poetinthe.city.co.uk Email: info@poetinthe.city.co.uk

The Poetry Society: The Poetry Society, 22 Betterton Street, London WC2H 9BX

Tel: 020 7420 9880 Email: info@poetrysociety.org.uk Website: www.poetrysociety.org.uk

SESSION OVERVIEW



<p>E1 English</p> <p>A Poison Tree Andy Croft</p>	<p>14-16 Age group</p>
<p>Learning Objectives To practice creative writing skills and become familiar with work by William Blake. To understand the effects of repressing feelings and the importance of expressing these.</p>	<p>Total Time 45 min +15 min optional extension</p>
<p>Resources  Worksheet 1. The Poison Tree by William Blake. Copies for each member of the class.</p>	
<p>Introduce the session and set the ground rules. Discuss as a whole group the benefits and risks of hiding feelings.</p>	<p>Introduction 10 mins</p> 
<p>Read aloud the poem <i>A Poison Tree</i> by William Blake. Discuss what the poet is saying in the poem.</p>	<p>Starter 10min</p> 
<p>Ask each person to write their own poem working from the template used by Blake.</p>	<p>Core activity 15 min</p> 
<p>Interpret a poem written by another young person. In small groups ask people to act out what is happening to understand the effects of repressing feelings and the importance of expressing these.</p>	<p>Optional extension 15min</p> 
<p>Ask two or three people to read their poem aloud. Reflect on the experience of writing and themes that have come up during the session.</p>	<p>Reflect 10min</p> 



PLAN E1

E1 A Poison Tree
English Andy Croft

14-16
Age group

Facilitator's notes

Aim

The aim of this session is to explore the benefits of expressing feelings and the danger of repressing them. The group will have the opportunity to read a William Blake (1752-1827) poem and write their own.

Poet Andy Croft explains, *"It is a good way of writing about negative feelings. You can be witty, for example describing the fruits of cruelty as 'deadly after just one bite'; the fruits of bitchiness 'grow sour', while the fruits of sloth are a 'failed marriage'. You can use vivid visual imagery, describing for example, the seeds of treachery that grow 'into a poisonous black-thorned rose,' or the desire for revenge that grows 'bent with humiliation'. Or you can try to make historical and cultural links, like the seeds of envy that produce a 'golden apple of discord' or the 'strange fruit of the lynch mob' that hangs from the tree of hatred."*

Ground rules

As personal issues may be discussed, please agree ground rules at the beginning of the session. *"In this session we will be covering some sensitive issues. You may be affected personally by the topic that we are discussing today or you may know someone else who is. Please be respectful and thoughtful of others, and treat the subject responsibly. If you would like to talk to someone after the session, you can go to [give a school contact] or Samaritans provides 24 hour confidential helpline (email jo@samaritans.org)."*

Introduction

Introduce the session and establish the ground rules.

Discuss briefly whether people mostly express their feelings openly in our society or whether they hide them?

- What are the benefits of hiding feelings?
- What is the danger of repressing feelings?
- What are the benefits of expressing them?

Starter

Read William Blake's Poem. Discuss what the poem means. For example, why do you think Blake chose an apple and not a banana?

Writing your own poem

Using the poem as a model, each person will choose a negative feeling and then fill in the missing words as though describing the growth of a poison tree.

10 Min
Introduction



Starter
10min



Core activity
15min



PLAN E1

E1 A Poison Tree
English Andy Croft

14-16
Age group

Encourage them to think of an emotion they are familiar with drawing from personal experiences is often much more effective.

I found the seeds...,
I planted them...,
I watered them with...,
Until the tree grew...,
And in its highest branches there grew...,
At night the wind in the tree was the sound of ...
And I knew this poisonous tree was mine.

Core activity
15min



Continued

Optional extension – Interpretation and drama

An excellent piece of writing came from a 15 year old girl talking about planting seeds of vanity:

I found the seeds sellotaped to the back of Snow White's mirror,
I planted them outside my bedroom window where I could watch them,
I watered them with low-fat diet water,
Until it grew graceful and thin,
And in its highest branches grew the fruits of vanity,
beautiful to look at, but rotten to taste,
At night the wind stayed away from my dying tree.
And I knew this poisonous tree was mine.

Discuss with the class their interpretation of this poem. In small groups ask people to interpret the poem and act out what is happening. Feed back to the class.

Optional extension
15min
Add extra time for large groups.



Reflect and discuss

Invite people to read back their poem. Ask them to reflect on how it felt to do this task and to read out their work.

Reflect on the themes that have come up during the session. Ask people to go away and to notice in the world around them how people use writing to express themselves (on a postcard, graffiti, music lyrics) and what negative and positive feelings these convey.

Reflect
10min



Session E1 – A Poison Tree
Worksheet 1 – Poem by William Blake

A Poison Tree

I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe;
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I water'd it in fears,
Night & morning with my tears;
And I sunned it with smiles
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night,
Till it bore an apple bright;
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine,

And into my garden stole
When the night had veil'd the pole:
In the morning glad I see
My foe outstretch'd beneath the tree

William Blake

SESSION OVERVIEW

E2 Explain Yourself! Telling through metaphor
English Cheryl Moskowitz

14-16
Age group


Learning Objectives

- To understand what a metaphor is and practice writing with metaphor.
- To become familiar with the work of Norman MacCaig.
- To practice skills in self awareness.

Total Time
45 min +15 min
optional
extension

Resources

Blank A3 sized paper for each person

 Worksheet with Norman MacCaig's poem *Aunt Julia*.

Old magazines for cutting up, scissors, glue OR drawing equipment

Explain the purpose of the session and establish the ground rules.

Introduction
5 mins



Ask people to imagine two real but different sides to themselves and to represent these by making a two part collage OR drawing two pictures.

Starter
15 min



Read the extract from *Aunt Julia* by Scottish Poet Norman MacCaig. Highlight his use of metaphor and draw the metaphor wheel on the board to explain how metaphors can be constructed. Create two lists of written metaphors, one for each side of the collage.

Core activity
20 min



Ask people to work in small groups, sharing metaphors in order to create a shared poem. Alternatively do this as a whole class.

Optional extension
15min



Ask people to read out their favourite metaphor from the session. Discuss why people felt more aware of one side of themselves than another. Summarise the powerful role of metaphor in expressing feelings.

Reflect
5min



PLAN E2

E2 Explain Yourself! Telling through metaphor
English Cheryl Moskowitz

14-16
Age group

Facilitator's notes

Aim

This session aims to create metaphor through image as a mode of self expression.

"With every day, and from both sides of my intelligence, the moral and the intellectual, I thus drew steadily nearer to that truth, by whose partial discovery I have been doomed to such a dreadful shipwreck: that man is not truly one, but truly two... I hazard the guess that man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens." Henry Jekyll's Full Statement from *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

Sometimes it can feel like there are two sides to you, like Jekyll and Hyde, but it can seem impossible to explain to others in a way that they might understand. In poetry, metaphor works to paint a portrait with words that people can relate to that makes emotional sense and that conveys the 'feeling' of what you mean. Sometimes, though, it is easier and better to start with the pictures before the words.

Ground rules

As personal issues may be discussed, please agree ground rules at the beginning of the session, *"In this session we will be covering some sensitive issues. You may be affected personally by the topic that we are discussing today, or you may know someone else who is. Please be respectful and thoughtful of others, and treat the subject responsibly. If you would like to talk to someone after the session, you can go to [give a school contact] or Samaritans which provides 24 hour confidential helpline 08457 90 90 90 (email jo@samaritans.org)."*

Introduction

Explain the purpose of the session and establish the ground rules.

Introduction
5 Min



Two sides of me - Collage exercise

The aim of this creative exercise is for young people to use images to express different sides of themselves. In the second half of the session they will elaborate on this using words.

Ask people to think about two real but different sides of themselves. For example sad/happy, hard-working/lazy, calm/aggressive, attractive/unattractive, friend/enemy, etc. Choose whatever feels right and true for you. Divide the A3 paper in half. When you have identified your 'split,' write them as headings at the top of each half of the paper. You are going to create two collages on the same piece of paper

Allow 10 -15min to look for images in magazines* that belong on one side or the other of their collages. They can cut or tear out the images. Emphasise that they may want to use only part of an image they find. For example, they may have found a picture of a face from which they only want to use the eyes or the smile. Maybe there is a country scene but they only want the sky. It could be just a colour they find that works or a picture of some sort of food, a car, anything.

Starter
15min



* Please note the collage exercise may require more time than is allocated here. An alternative to cutting out images may be to ask students to draw two pictures.

PLAN E2

E2 Explain Yourself! Telling through metaphor
English Cheryl Moskowitz

14-16
Age group

Aunt Julia

Read at this extract from a poem by Scottish Poet Norman MacCaig (1910-1996) *Aunt Julia*

*She was buckets
and water flouncing into them.
She was winds pouring wetly
round house-ends.
She was brown eggs, black skirts
and a keeper of threepennybits
in a teapot.*

© Norman MacCaig Estate

Notice how he uses metaphor to describe the person. Also note the difference between using the simile '*she is like a bucket*' and the metaphor '*she is buckets*.' In the latter, the poet goes on to describe the details of the bucket she was in using words like flouncing and pouring wetly. This elaboration helps the reader to understand in much more detail what the writer is trying to express.

Poet Cheryl Moskowitz says, "You might think to say something like 'I am a cracked teapot' sounds ridiculous but if it is the right image it gets the meaning across better than if you had just said, 'I feel a bit sad and useless at the moment.' Sometimes we want to tell people how we feel but we find it difficult to find the right words that will make them really understand. With a poem you can find images that let the other person feel with you. Sometimes people cry when they read a poem and that's because it has hit a nerve centre, they really 'get it.' Through metaphor we can get to the essence of a person or an experience. The right metaphor can hold meaning for many more people than just the person who wrote it."

Core activity
20min



Metaphor wheel

To help people understand what a metaphor is, draw a pie chart on the board. Ask them to name themes that a metaphor could be written about and fill in these segments of the pie chart.

Examples included are shown here.



PLAN E2

E2 Explain Yourself! Telling through metaphor
English Cheryl Moskowitz

14-16
Age group

Writing with metaphor

Using the collages, create two lists of written metaphors, one for each of the different sides start each with *He is ...* or *She is ...*,

Write the image with whatever embellishment feels appropriate. For example, '*He is a shiny black car that has never been driven*' or '*She is a glass of milk, cool and fresh, He is a rainbow after a storm, She is a dark cloud over the city...*'

Core activity
20min



Continued



Optional Extension – Creating a group poem

The lists of metaphors can be used to create a portrait poem that shows the two different sides of a personality. More collages can also be made to explore particular emotions or experiences through metaphor. For example, find images that show your idea of 'anger' or 'happiness' or 'school', 'friendship', 'bullies', etc. and write these into a poem.

Ask people to work in small groups, sharing metaphors in order to create a shared poem. Alternatively, the exercise can be done individually or as a whole class.

Optional extension
15min

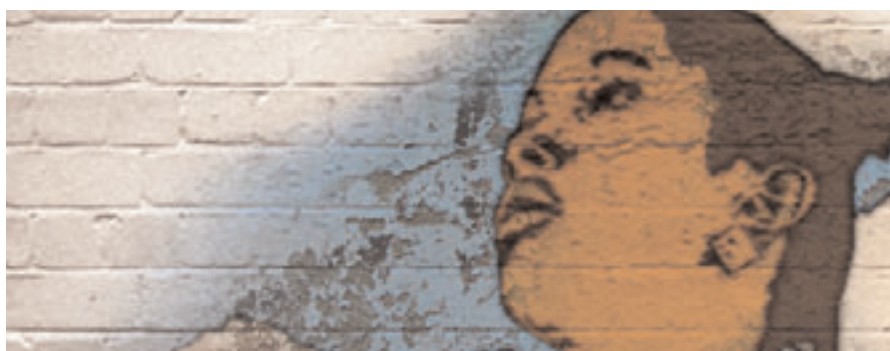


Reflect and discuss

Ask people to read out their favourite metaphor from the session. If possible take one from each person and acknowledge their contribution.

In summary, writing through metaphor is a particularly powerful way to express feelings in a way that other people can relate to, something that is difficult to do through other means of communication. Expressing thoughts and feelings, whether through writing, reading, pictures or music, can help people to feel understood and to build relationships with others. Both of these things help to protect people's emotional health and wellbeing.

Reflect
5 min



SESSION OVERVIEW

E3 Painting with words
English Wendy French


14-16
Age group

Learning objectives

To practice expressing thoughts and feelings through writing.
To develop skills in managing and communicating difficult feelings relating to loss.

Total Time
45 min +15 min
optional
extension

Resources

 Worksheet 1. 'The door' by Miroslav Holub. Copies for each member of the class.

Explain the purpose of the session and establish the ground rules.

Introduction
10 mins



Read *The door* by Miroslav Holub and discuss what the poem is about.
In pairs ask people to write a similar short poem starting with the same opening line
'Go and open the door and added you may find...'

Starter
15 min



Explain the Word Palette exercise and make a list of words under each category heading.
Ask people to write down two things that they have lost one minor, one major.
Give people 10 minutes to write a poem about a loss using words from the word palette lists.

Core activity
15 min



In small groups, take a stanza from each person's poem and use it to make a group poem.
Ask each group to read out their poem and explain what it is about.

Optional extension
15 min



Invite people to read back their poem and reflect on how it felt to read out their work.
Discuss how poetry can/cannot help us with our feelings.

Reflect
10min



E3 Painting with words
English Wendy French

14-16
Age group

Facilitator's notes

Aim

This session is about young peoples understanding of how writing can be used to express feelings and, in particular, managing difficult feelings, an essential part of good emotional health. It touches on some personal issues including loss but this is done in a way that allows people to think about these in a safe way, without straying into therapeutic territory for which poetry can also sometimes be used. The group will have the chance to read poetry by Czech poet Miroslav Holub (1928 -1998) as well as compose poetry themselves in a creative and enjoyable way.

One girl wrote about the divorce of her parents and how she feels split down the middle, a foot in each house and neither shoe fitting.

Ground rules

As personal issues may be discussed, please agree ground rules at the beginning of the session, *"In this session we will be covering some sensitive issues. You may be affected personally by the topic that we are discussing today, or you may know someone else who is. Please be respectful and thoughtful of others, and treat the subject responsibly. If you would like to talk to someone after the session, you can go to [give a school contact] or Samaritans which provides a 24 hour confidential helpline 0845 90 90 90 (email jo@samaritans.org)."*

Introduction

Explain the purpose of the session and establish the ground rules.

Introduction
5 Min



The door

Read *'The door'* by Miroslav Holub and discuss what the poem is about.

This poem is about being willing to look for opportunities that may not seem obvious at first. It's about being open to new opportunities that may come our way.

If we open our doors and look outside we may be surprised by what we find. Examples might be trying something new when we don't really feel like it, or telling someone something personal which we had been keeping to ourselves.

Ask people to work in pairs to write a similar short poem starting with the same opening line, *'Go and open the door and added you may find...'*

Starter
15 min



Word palette exercise

Adapted from an exercise by Jane Hirshfield

When a painter starts to paint he mixes different colours to get the right shades. In the same way when we are writing we need to think of different words and not always use the obvious ones. Instead of red we could use scarlet or crimson for example.

Make a list of a few category headings, and ask people to think of unusual responses to

Core activity
15 min



PLAN E3

E3 Painting with words
English Wendy French

14-16
Age group

go under each heading. E.g. Give me 3 colours, 3 sounds, 3 textures etc. Use this to build up a word bank.

Next ask people to write down one thing that they have lost that has been minor, i.e. a sock in the washing machine, a cheap biro pen. Now ask them to write down a loss that has been major i.e. moving house, leaving friends behind, the death of a person or animal. Please say to people that if there is something at this stage that feels too painful to write about this may not be the right moment to do it and they can leave it off their list.

People then choose whether to write a poem about the minor or major loss, weaving in words from the word bank or others they have come up with.

Core activity
15min



Continued



In small groups, take a stanza from each person's poem and use it to make a group poem. Ask each group to read out their poem and explain what it is about.

Optional
extension
15 min



Invite people to read back their poem. Ask them to reflect on how it felt to do this task and to read out their work.

Lead a discussion on how poetry can/cannot help us with our feelings. Reflect on the way writing down something painful or difficult or intense can help to lighten the intensity of a feeling or situation. When we write something down on paper we're slightly removing the intense feeling from our physical and emotional selves to a piece of paper. To see a problem facing you is the first step to solving it. *As poet E. M. Forster said, 'How do I know what I feel until I see it written down?'.*

Reflect
10min



Session E3 – Painting with words
Worksheet 1 – Poem by Miroslav Holub

The door



Go and open the door.
Maybe outside there's
a tree, or a wood,
a garden,
or a magic city.

Go and open the door.
Maybe a dog's rummaging.
Maybe you'll see a face,
or an eye,
or the picture
of a picture.

Go and open the door.
If there's a fog
it will clear.

Go and open the door.
Even if there's only
the darkness ticking,
even if there's only
the hollow wind,
even if
nothing
is there,
go and open the door.

At least
there'll be
a draught.

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Miroslav Holub, *'Poems Before & After'*, trans. Ewald Osers et al
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behalf of the author's estate and the translator.

SESSION OVERVIEW

E4 Writing off the page
English Aisling Doherty


14-16
Age group

Learning Objectives


To practice expressing thoughts and feelings using creative writing.
To develop skills in empathy.
To discuss how self expression can be therapeutic, using the example of self - harm.

Total Time
45 min +15 min
optional
extension


Resources

 Prepare a worksheet with provocative lyrics from a contemporary piece of music relevant to the age group. E.g. Eminem song *Words Are My Weapon* from <http://www.azlyrics.com>. Audio equipment to play the music.

Prepare images that reflect the role of people in society. Example: *Images of Men*, editor Colin Fowler - The Men's Project, Parents Advice Centre, published by PAC Press 2001.

 For the extension exercise, prepare examples of self expression through poetry. At the time of publishing, poems from people who self - harm <http://groups.msn.com/SilentStruggles/poetry.msn>
A self - harm leaflet or fact sheet. Examples on www.samaritans.org/deal.

Introduce the session and establish the ground rules.

 Hand out the worksheet with lyrics without telling them they are from a piece of music. Ask them to read the words and give their thoughts on it.

Introduction
5 mins



Lead a class discussion on what makes a poem.
Reveal what music the lyrics are from and play the piece.

Starter
10 min



Explain the free flow exercise and allow them to write for 5 minutes based on the jump off lines.
After 5 minutes ask them to read out one or two lines they particularly like.

Core activity 1
10 min




Show the images and discuss those that provoke the strongest reactions.
Explain the word splurge activity and give them 5 minutes to write about the picture.
Ask people to choose a person in the picture and write as if they were this person.

Core activity 2
15 min



Read through the poems on self - harm. Checking understanding of self harm.

 Hand out self harm fact sheets to take away. In pairs, ask them to discuss why self expression might be important for people who self harm and how poetry helps.

Optional extension
15 min



Discuss the differences in writing as themselves and as someone else. Ask people to choose a line from what they wrote.

Reflect
5 min



PLAN E4

E4 Writing off the page
English Aisling Doherty

14-16
Age group

Facilitator's notes

Aim

The aim of this session is for young people to experience how poetry can be an enjoyable way to express themselves and to understand others.


Poet Aisling Doherty says, "At the end of this session people should have a sense of achievement and a sense that what they wrote or expressed was valued and respected by another person and hopefully by themselves. In the feedback sheets I received one person wrote: 'I didn't know poetry could be like that, thanks for letting us write how we talk.'"

Ground rules

As personal issues may be discussed, please agree ground rules at the beginning of the session, *"In this session we will be covering some sensitive issues. You may be affected personally by the topic that we are discussing today, or you may know someone else who is. Please be respectful and thoughtful of others, and treat the subject responsibly. If you would like to talk to someone after the session, you can go to [give a school contact] or Samaritans provide a 24 hour confidential helpline. 08457 90 90 90 Email jo@samaritans.org."*

Introduction

Explain the purpose of the session and establish the ground rules.

 Hand out the worksheet with lyrics without telling them they are from a piece of music. Ask them to read the words and give their thoughts on it.

Introduction
5 Min



What makes a poem?

Lead a class discussion on What exactly is a poem? What makes a poem a poem?

Poet Aisling Doherty says: *"There are many possible answers here, but arguably a poem is a poem 'because someone says so.' If a person writes 3 amazing lines which express his inner most thoughts, fears or desires and he says that's his poem, then who am I to argue?"*

If they have not guessed already, reveal what music the lyrics are from and if possible play the song to the class after they have had this discussion.

Starter
10min



PLAN E4

E4 Writing off the page
English Aisling Doherty

14-16
Age group

Warm up- Writing off the page

The following free flow exercise is a warm up designed to make participants in the session realise that whatever they write is ok and will be accepted in the session.

Poet Aisling Doherty says: "A lot of people (especially beginners) are afraid to write because they think that everything that goes down on the page has to be perfect or exactly what they want to say first time round when in reality it doesn't work like that. I usually say to people at the beginning of the exercise just keep going. Even if you write, 'this is crap, i can't do this,' over and over again on the page, eventually you'll break through the block and something will come out."

Explain the free flow exercise. This exercise is one where a person takes a jumping off point, a word, a lyric, or a line from a poem and then they write constantly for a set time. They'll do this for five minutes. The idea is not to lift your hand from the page, just to keep writing down anything and everything that comes into your head....no matter if you think its rubbish. Your jumping off lines are:

- Fear strings a weak man up like a puppet
- Anger lay by me all night long
- Loneliness pushes a man into the storm without an umbrella

After 5 minutes ask them to look through their writing and see if they find one or two lines they particularly like, then read them out or underline them and keep them for later.

Photo pack word association splurge

This is a two part exercise using the images you have prepared from the *Images of Men* book or other source. It allows people to practice their empathy skills.

Explain that this pack contains various images of men, and society's perception of the role of men. For example, father & son at a football match, man changing a baby's nappy, man sprawled on sofa watching television, man and woman kissing, two men kissing, man going to the dole office, man crying at a graveside, bullying in a toilet etc.

Ask the group to choose an image that provokes a strong reaction, one that they either like or dislike. Draw out their reactions and attitudes to issues in the picture.

Now do the word splurge exercise. Each taking a piece of paper and an image, they should write all the words that are connected with the picture and think about their own feelings about the picture (both positive and negative) but whilst the specifics, settings, objects etc.

Once this is done, ask people to complete the second part of the exercise. They will choose a person in the picture and repeat the free flow exercise from the warm up. This time they will write as if they are the person in the picture.

Discuss the differences in writing as themselves and as someone else. Ask people to choose a line from what they wrote.

Core activity

1
10 min



Core activity

2
15 min



PLAN E4

E4 Writing off the page
English Aisling Doherty

14-16
Age group



Optional extension- Self harm awareness

Read through the other poems you have collected. Take a few minutes to check people's understanding of what self harm is. Ask them to discuss in pairs why self expression might be important for people who self harm and how poetry helps.



Hand out the self - harm fact sheet for them to take away.

Reflect how poems are used as a method of release from anger and pain as well as love, happiness and hope. The old saying goes, 'A problem shared is a problem halved.' When people are going through a hard time they may feel no one understands what they're going through. Sharing poems on a website or in person can help people to realise they are not alone.

Optional
extension
15 min



Reflect and discuss

Ask how it felt expressing yourself on paper instead of in words?
How was it putting yourself in someone else's shoes in the picture exercise?

In summary, everyone has a poem in them. Poetry is not stuffy and something read in a dusty book. There are many ways to express strong feelings rather than lashing out, hurting yourself or another person. and these can now be shared around the world via the internet. Sharing thoughts, feelings and experiences in this way helps people to feel understood and connected to each other, so is really important for a person's wellbeing and their emotional health.

Thank them for their contribution and for sharing their work.

Reflect
10min

